

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS LILONGWE 000299

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT FLEXES ITS MUSCLES

1. SUMMARY. The third session of the Malawi National Assembly since the May 2004 elections opened at the New State House in Lilongwe on March 30. In the opening session, Parliament rejected the President's nominee for Inspector General of Police. Party alliances were not clearly spelled out, and Parliament remains without a permanent venue. END SUMMARY.

2. The third session of the National Assembly since the May 2004 elections opened in Lilongwe on March 30. The sitting will run until Friday April 8, and will cover several items, including an amendment to the Constitution, food security, and a mid-term report on budgetary performance.

3. The first order of business was debate of the confirmation of the Inspector General of Police, Mrs. Mary Nangwale, who was ultimately rejected. This is the first time Malawi's Parliament has rejected a President's choice for head of the Police; however, it also marks the first time Parliament has ever had the opportunity to do so. The Nangwale vote was not necessarily divided along party lines, and in the debate the issue of gender (Nangwale is Malawi's first female Inspector General) proved equally significant to politics. During a roll call vote 88 MPs voted against her confirmation, 83 MPs voted for her confirmation and eight MPs abstained.

4. With the president's departure from the United Democratic Front (UDF), the government no longer commands a majority in Parliament. Therefore, the Speaker instructed that political parties with some of their members in cabinet would sit on his right hand side, where a ruling party usually sits. This effectively neutralized any potential wrangling over seating arrangements, traditionally a representation of party alliance in the Malawian Parliament.

5. Parliament is meeting temporarily in the New State House, which President Mutharika occupied as his official residence in December. At that time the president informed Parliament that it must find a new permanent home. The Speaker announced that funding for a new building has been secured, although no completion date has been set. The Speaker also announced our Public Affairs Section's offer of free Internet access and use of the Information Resource Center (IRC). The announcement received a very positive response from MPs, who do not have computers or Internet access.

6. COMMENT. Party alliances remain yet unclear, and Parliament's failure to confirm Nangwale (who had recently faced widespread criticism and was of questionable political neutrality) is not necessarily emblematic of things to come. Rather, what is most significant is that Parliament was able to assert itself and did not simply bow to the executive branch, as it had in the past. Parliament is demanding respect for the country's constitution, which is a healthy sign for democracy in Malawi. END COMMENT.

GILMOUR